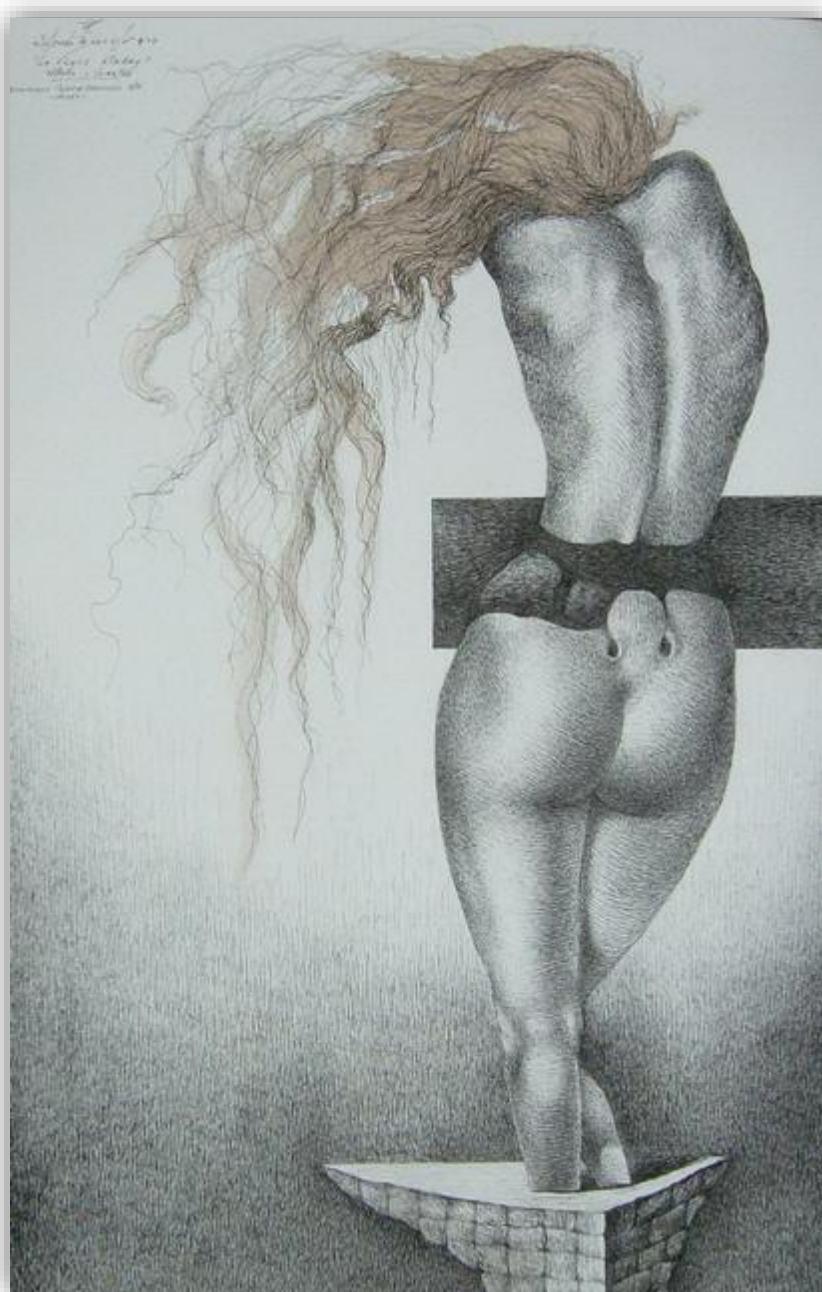


# Imperfect Venus

## A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury



FUNKY DOG PUBLISHING



# Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

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# Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

FUNKY DOG PUBLISHING



DETROIT, MICHIGAN USA



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## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### *For Mockingbirds Everywhere*

*“Mockingbirds are the true artists of the bird kingdom. Which is to say, although they're born with a song of their own, an innate riff that happens to be one of the most versatile of all ornithological expressions, mocking birds aren't content to merely play the hand that is dealt them. Like all artists, they are out to rearrange reality. Innovative, willful, daring, not bound by the rules to which others may blindly adhere, the mockingbird collects snatches of birdsong from this tree and that field, appropriates them, places them in new and unexpected contexts, recreates the world from the world. For example, a mockingbird in South Carolina was heard to blend the songs of thirty-two different kinds of birds into a ten-minute performance, a virtuoso display that serve no practical purpose, falling, therefore, into the realm of pure art.”*

— Tom Robbins, *Skinny Legs and All*

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## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Two Women

In a textured background  
Of blue and white  
That resembles  
The color of the Caribbean  
Broken by white capped waves  
Or a heavy snowfall set  
Against the deep blue  
Of late December.

One must look for a moment,  
Into the illusion of a headless torso  
That wears breasts as its face,  
Past the optical trickery  
Of a man's eyes  
Always looking for  
Another woman.

There is magic in lines  
Of charcoal and pastel  
Drawn to form a study  
Of breasts,  
One small and firm  
Tipped by a pert nub  
That is a pinch of flesh,  
The others  
Larger and sagging,  
Each nipple a metal rivet.

A pair  
Identical to each other  
And to no others,  
Breasts like ripe mangoes  
Hanging from a drooping branch,  
Nipples like firm ripe berries  
Growing on a low bush.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Sunday Morning Sill Life (or Sunday Morning Portrait)

Hydrangeas arranged in a crystal vase  
On a glass-topped cocktail table,  
Like an abalone shell sitting on a bookshelf,  
They are a soft watercolor wash  
Of pale pinks and violets.

And if this poem were to venture  
Into the verbosity of a second verse,  
We would see her stretched out on the sofa,  
Lying amid sections of the Times  
Strewn willy-nilly across her torso.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### All Eyes Look at You

Many parts of you see  
And at the same time  
Do not,  
For sight and blindness are not limited  
To the eyes alone,  
Just as we say so much more  
Than emerges from our mouth.

There is a frightening face  
That fills the empty space  
Between us, and your  
Words give rise  
To a form whose features  
You have forgotten  
And whose true character  
Remains unseen.

There are so many  
Illusions that you alone  
Breathe life into,  
Shadows and phantoms  
That only you animate.  
This is why you never see  
The person you love  
Without the distortions  
Of our most hopeful fantasies.



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### Small Dreams

In dreams  
Lit in barroom light  
Like a dim lounge  
Of a neon-blue nebula,  
Where everything  
Is shadow and silhouette  
And nothing is seen  
In full illumination.  
I dream of her  
Sitting lotus style in a large hall,  
And she wears sheer white  
Flowing fabric  
That floats slowly  
On the air  
Like feathers  
As she moves.  
She is bird-like  
In the smallness  
Of fragile frailness,  
As she sits  
Alone upon the floor  
Looking up at me.

She is a sparrow  
Fallen from a nest.  
The anger that was  
Between us,  
Suddenly never was.  
We feel only love and loss,  
And are touched  
With soft forgiveness,  
The confused vulnerability  
Of dreamers.  
And as I bend over  
To embrace her  
She is a nestling  
Once again, wedged  
In that small space  
Supported by  
The branching arteries  
Of my heart.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### nude

naked form  
a series of fluid lines  
that flow in slow curves  
as you sleep  
stretched across the  
mattress

and where nipples  
meet breasts  
rays of light seep out  
from some inner source  
of brightness  
unseen and mysterious

black hose ends  
at your upper thigh  
and supports the hard  
and soft lines that  
meet at the simplicity  
of white skin

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Genius of Dance

When my son was young  
(he is grown now and never calls and does not speak to me)  
we would sit together beneath the Genius of Dance  
in the days when love was more than an ancient artifact,  
like a Roman sarcophagus carved and crowded with winged cupids.

The illusion of dance  
(like the abstraction of filial love)  
is that it is effortless and floats weightless on Saturday afternoons  
among the pictures by Picasso and Braque  
to the sound of three cubist musicians playing silently in the gallery.

Where the slender vertical of legs, torso, head and hands  
most fully resembles flight, and wing-like arms extend in the air,  
we would rest there together, before the minimalism of his absence  
and this fragmented and frozen scene that is the painted present.

And I wonder in the museum gallery of childhood memory,  
if my son remembers when the oils of a della robbia blue sky were still wet,  
and the landscape was open and uncluttered  
as we sat in the shadow of motion beneath the Genius of Dance.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### A Dreamer's Journey

I search for her in my dreams  
Wearing the bowl shaped helmet of Hermes,  
Covered in dark blue velvet,  
With white feathered wings  
Protruding from its sides.

For somewhere along a dreamer's journey  
We were separated, and I lost her.  
Frantically I look for her and  
Fly on the night air, weightless  
And light as a baroque concerto.

The mercurial and malleable nature of love  
Confounds and confuses me, for it is  
Like the phantasmal spirit of God,  
It flickers in and out of existence,  
Present one moment, absent another.

I stop searching for a moment  
Befuddled under a dark lapis sky  
That holds strange constellations,  
And as I stand alone in an exotic  
Dreamscape half-conscious

Of being here before with her,  
An allusive memory that runs,  
Escapes and scatters  
Like beads of quicksilver  
That slip through grasping fingers.

In the weird tautology that is  
A dreamer's agenda, I forget all purpose,  
My sense of mission muddled, and  
Thoughts of her are lost once more in  
The sleepy eclecticism of a summer night.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### General Lee on His Horse

On Monument Avenue there is a roundabout of lost causes that surrounds a statue of General Lee on his horse. Traveler is walking with head lowered at a modest pace, and the general sitting up straight in the saddle holds the reigns lightly, his posture and stance one of ultimate resignation.

On this street of bronze equestrian war heroes this is the grandest, with a tall ornate pedestal of white marble that raises both horse and rider in worshipful benediction high into a summer sky. I think in passing, how stately and respectable, noble it is, in understated reserve it stands, regal and heroic, above the passing traffic.

A monument to the misguided, yet it looks so moderate and mild for a cause so crazy, to subjugate, violate, dominate and enslave, to lead, follow, fight and die for purposes perverse and evil requires a different pose that more fully communicates the magnitude of such wholesale madness.

I say recast this bronze into what it really is, with rider leaning wild eyed and forward in his saddle, speeding deadly fast in a galloping charge, show real history, the true energy required to propelled violence at such velocity, the passion that drives the wrongness of such movements, put that into a summer sky.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Plum Street

I pause as I pass the corner  
Of Plum Street and Main,  
For it is there that I find  
That I have lost  
Some critical component  
Of personal identity,  
A key “something”  
That seems to have  
Suddenly slipped away.

Memories are like city streets  
And progress like poems  
That take you in a certain direction,  
To a particular place,  
And then intersect and turn  
In switchback fashion  
To run back upon themselves,  
In surprising and often crazy ways  
That make no sense,  
Hairpin turns take you from anticipation  
To the deflated silence of quiet cul-de-sacs  
And dead-end disappointment.

The phantasmagoria of my past  
Has a hiatus so abrupt  
That I awaken from  
A psychogenic fugue  
And find myself in some strange city  
At the starkly plain and uninteresting  
Intersection of Plum Street and Main,  
Without her.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Judgment Day

She has filled  
The long hours  
Of the most ordinary laundry day  
With all the drama and pathos  
Of the last judgment,  
Sorting the whites from the darks  
Like the saved from the damned,  
This sock in that pile  
These shorts in this pile.  
Concentrating intently,  
She separates this sinner  
From that saint, and consigns  
Each soul to their proper place  
In the divine order  
Of a balanced load,  
Where all sins are forgiven  
As the agitator forever stirs  
Dark grey waters of the Styx  
And wash/spin cycles  
Alternate eternally  
And hum on toward  
Endless harmony.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Our Flat on Floyd St. on Sunday Mornings

There is a special light  
In our flat on Floyd Street  
On Sunday mornings.  
With the window shades drawn  
And the sun shining through,  
Diffused and white,  
There is a translucent glow  
That fills each room.

On such mornings of silent,  
Quiet grace, there is a special quality  
In the mostly washed out light,  
Colorless and dialed down  
To pearl, bone and ivory,  
A ghostly paleness like a  
White still life by Giorgio Morandi,  
That is me waking up alone.



## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Robinson Street

The street is empty,  
But for a city bus that travels,  
Lumbering and slow,  
In the dim light  
Of early morning;  
Its rows of red tail lights  
Are lines of votive candles  
Burning in the half-lit silence  
Of the mind's  
Sleepy sanctuary.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Jasmine

Through the thaumaturgy  
Of a May morning,  
The jasmine climbing up  
The backyard fence  
Explodes with little asterisks (\*\*\*\*\*)  
Of bone-white blossoms  
That carry a faint phantom of odor,  
No more than a wisp in the air,  
That has a subtle smell  
Of earthy sweetness,  
And reminds me  
Of her scent  
When I awaken  
With my face pressed  
Against her neck.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### This Particular Moment

There is a proclivity for hope and optimism  
When faced with a blank page,  
Like white marble from Vermont  
It is heavy with possibility,  
Dense with some inner inevitability  
That must find expression.

So as these words twist and wind  
Their way into some new beginnings of being,  
That stretch neatly across each line  
And take on a life of their own  
That is fully separate and apart from us  
At this particular moment.

Let them take the shape of us  
On the living room sofa on Sunday morning,  
Sitting in the light shining from tall windows  
Facing Floyd, lifting coffee cups to our lips,  
A bird in a bush, the sound of wings flapping,  
As we rustle to adjust news pages.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Floyd Street

The moon in the east,  
And in the west, the backlit clouds of sunset  
Is the sky of an August night.  
The cicadas grow louder  
In the high green vaults of elm trees  
That stretch over Floyd Street.  
It is more a noise than a song,  
A buzz-saw eating through hardwood  
Cuts through a quiet evening.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Summer Day

This summer day has tendentious leanings  
And tender feelings for the green leaves of jasmine  
Climbing along my backyard fence,

Along the gravel alley laying outstretched  
Silent and still like a patient sleeping  
In the white linens of hospital bed,

On a long and lingering July afternoon  
That is protean in the way it slides away,  
Slipping with syrup-like slowness

Toward the orange, and later mauve, of sunset  
And takes on the deep violet shape  
Of a summer night.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Nude with Lilies

On her thigh  
Was a tattoo of flowers intertwined,  
A floral arrangement of vivid blues,  
Greens, reds and oranges  
That grew up behind  
Where the delicate elastic band  
Of her panties bordered her leg.

And I swear  
As I leaned forward  
To plant a gentle kiss  
On the centermost bloom,  
That I inhaled a wisp of spring,  
A trace of freshness  
That was the faint fragrance  
Of a lily's petals.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### A Red Roof

Alone it stood  
With boarded doors  
And shuttered windows,  
Rising from a field  
Grown over and untended,  
For so much depends  
On a beige brick building  
With a red roof.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Poem Inspired by Pierre Bonnard's "The Pont de Grenelle and the Eiffel Tower"

Upriver, the Eiffel tower dominates the distance,  
Rising like some spectral shape high above  
The low buildings of Paris that stretch out below,  
Sprawling along the horizon in blue shadows,  
Under the indigo sky of winter morning  
Or the lilac of an overcast autumn afternoon.

In the distance, the water of the Seine,  
Running beneath a bridge,  
Holds pools of deeper violet hues  
Than the sky above it, and trees without leaves  
Line the street and raise bare limbs and branches  
Upward indicating a death-like coldness.

In the foreground, a small faux dog sniffs its way  
Along the sidewalk, and brightly colored figures  
Standout from the twilight of a Paris landscape  
Like two-dimensional stage props,  
Swaying cardboard cutouts, that are  
Poor representations of real people.



A Lugubrious Acquaintance

She stood talking to me  
In late afternoon on the street,  
And as she talked  
I stopped looking at her,  
And saw only the darkness of her  
Projected on the broken concrete  
Of the sidewalk.

I stood and listened  
To the photographic negative  
Of her talking,  
Hands and arms moving  
With her words and the shadow gestures  
Silhouetted in the tropical brightness  
Of our chance meeting.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### The Death of Caesar

Caesar's heavy chair overturned, a remnant of the violence,  
As the conspirators gather holding up their swords and shouting.  
The great hall echoing their cries as they celebrate their success:  
The subjugation of the Senate ended, the city liberated!  
Caesar, so loved by the rabble, gone!  
Caesar, the leader of legions, master of the mobs, gone!

Lying near the foreground in the Theater of Pompey for all to see,  
Tangled in his blood-stained toga, the body of dead Caesar.  
Shrouded in his robes he is stretched across a mosaic floor.  
The statue of Pompey the Great, with blood-smeared  
Handprints on its base, rises up and towers over the prone form  
Of a man sprawled lifeless before it.

A dead despot, more human than divine, as all his godliness  
Seeps from his veins and pools in puddles on the mosaic and  
Runs like the Rubicon through the channels that separate the tesserae.  
His head still wears the golden laurel wreath, and one bare arm  
Is exposed and extends unmoving. He lays frozen as  
He fell, his feet apart and wrapped in white foot ware.

Almost unnoticed in the soft light, far from the crowd of conspirators,  
A solitary man remains in his seat. His head slightly bowed.  
He quietly sobs as he recalls the attack moments ago, how Caesar struggled  
And fought silently like a soldier until he fell beneath their weapons.  
They slashed away at imperial grandeur, cut deep into noble Roman glory  
Until only the man is left.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Inspired by Prophetic Verses: A Comparison of Bob Marley's "Survival" alongside Aimé Césaire's "Discourse on Colonialism" by Braden Ruddy

There was a woman in "an era of structural adjustment",  
When I was busy deconstructing and debunking my past,  
Who came back from Africa and brought me a gift,  
A little box of poetry pamphlets and  
Broadsides from distant places.

There was a tiny booklet of blue paper  
Tucked between the many times folded  
And tightly packed verse; a lone essay  
That spoke of "Bob Marley's notion of Babylon  
And Césaire's notions of colonialism and civilization."

I was searching for "lice in the beard of Saturn",  
Or a "strange firefly cake hurled into the grey face of time",  
But upon reading, I discovered it was not Prophetic,  
Not Verse, nor was there even a single negritude word  
Flung into the provincial whiteness of my petty bourgeois face.

Now back to the woman, who brought me a gift from Africa  
Of mostly English verse, with a solitary essay, mislabeled  
And masquerading as what it was not,  
Tucked tightly among the poems,  
A herring packed among sardines.

She and I planned to read a new poem each night,  
But the poetry of mostly bad, insipid lines  
Made me close my eyes and sigh with impatience,  
And after one or more pathogenic poems,  
I stopped reading them to her.

She no longer sleeps in my bed, and the poems  
Remain boxed tightly on the nightstand  
Like deadly bacilli growing in a Petri dish,  
Hermetically sealed in the isolation chamber  
Of her longer than expected absence.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Dog Barking on a Winter Night

By the junkyard  
Where automobile parts are stacked high  
In tangled piles of plastic and metal,  
Yellow doors lay next to red ones,  
Blue hoods on top of silver,  
And rusted engines  
That have been separated from chassis  
Lay exposed with hoses still attached  
Like a heart with arteries  
Lying in a stainless steel basin left  
On an operating table.

It is there where my passing,  
On a sidewalk marked with gang graffiti,  
Awakens the watch dog  
That sleeps on leather bench seats  
In a pickup cab with the doors removed.  
I am startled  
By the attack as it jumps onto the fence,  
How it bares large white teeth  
With a snarling growl,  
And the respiration exhaled with each bark  
Clouds into a cold and chilling vapor  
On a winter night.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Dancer with an Orange Circle

She reached out  
For what she saw was me,  
But in reality  
Was not me at all,  
Only a distorted shadow  
Cast by what I truly am.

Her flower like face,  
A blossom uplifted and  
Framed in the petals  
Of her hair  
As she moved toward  
my reflection.

From the green earth  
she leaned to me  
With arms outstretched  
In a blue day  
That transitioned  
To a purple night.

Plant like in her resolve,  
To shift earth and stone,  
And by the light  
Of an orange sun  
She saw me, touched me,  
Moved me.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Orientation

Today, I am enveloped in a blue haze,  
Locked within the white chalk line boundaries  
Of a compartmentalized space I cannot escape.

Our opposite orientations, never more glaring  
Than now; I need the stenciled text  
“This Side Up” to accompany a pointing arrow

That provides direction in a topsy turvy  
Catawampus world where we are frozen  
in a tragic stance that tells a tale of us

Living in a melancholy universe filled  
With longings unmet and opportunities lost,  
In a day dimly backlit, where graduated shades

Of browns and ghost pale pastels  
Blend into a dull and colorless portrait  
Of the memory of you hanging over me

Like a storm cloud that hovers ominous,  
Dark and unmoving on a horizon  
That is a slanted and uneven,

Hand drawn with a white grease pencil  
Like all the other self-created lines  
Of separation that we cannot cross.

### A Dream's Repetition

I return again and again  
To a dream's repetition,  
Repeated nightly  
Where I find myself at  
La Plaza de Toros en Mérida  
On New Year's Day.

The band is playing a merry tune,  
And I am sitting with a large crowd  
In the sombre seats  
Enjoying the cooling shade  
On a brightly burning afternoon  
That is a dreamer's respite.

In the ring, a matador  
Opens his traje de luces,  
Unbuttons his vest  
To expose his torso to  
A white bull lowering  
Its head and raking its hooves.

It charges like a  
Massive avalanche of snow,  
A mountain top speeding forward  
To meet the sunset of a  
Crimson cape and  
Then I awake.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### My Head

The thought of you  
In my head is always  
A little flurry of wings  
Like a finch  
That jumps  
With a flutter  
From one perch  
To another.

Through the door  
Left open,  
Your song has  
Escaped,  
And now  
My head is like  
An empty cage,  
Sadly silent.



## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Imperfect Venus

A Venus  
For the modern age  
Her hair long and flowing  
In a way Botticelli would paint,  
Yet not quite so perfect,  
Wearing her skin like stockings  
Held in place by the contrivances  
Of belts, straps and snaps.

A Venus transfixed  
In a contrapposto pose.  
Her lean masculine torso  
Tied to the transplanted  
Curves of plump softness  
That is her round and  
Feminine bottom.

A Venus trapped by  
A conspiracy of contraptions  
And inner contradictions,  
She languishes as a prisoner,  
Frozen in place  
And immobile,  
Awaiting her rebirth.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Minos

Standing within the gates of hell,  
I expect no mercy from Minos  
At the moment of my judgment.

I will offer neither excuse  
Nor give any explanation.  
I will tell no twisted tale of woe,

But rather I will let my guilt weigh me down  
To the depth I fully deserve,  
So let the cantilever arm of Minos

Pick me up and place me  
In a dark place of my own design.  
I will not despair, for deep in me

Is a memory of a Mexican morning  
Filled with golden light and unseen parrots that  
Chatter In the branches of an avocado tree.

I will remember the wind  
As it moves through the palms  
And makes the sound of waves

Surging against the shore.  
I will hear her too,  
Most faintly at first,

Floating just above  
The sound of the sea in the fronds,  
Her voice calling me through the surf.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Reassurance

In the blue twilight  
She appears  
An approximation  
Of ripeness and life  
In full flower,  
A mimesis  
Of hand drawn lines  
Ethereal,  
Ghostlike,  
Transparent,

And an Illusion's  
Soft symmetry  
Of wide shoulders  
Framing round and  
Hemispheric breasts  
And a gentle tapering  
Toward torso and  
Stomach  
That widens again  
At the hips  
And narrows softly  
Toward thighs,  
Legs,  
Calves,  
All supported  
By thin insubstantial  
Ankles  
And feet,  
Half here,  
Half not.

In the background  
The poet stands,  
Stiff and statue like  
Some monolithic monument  
Beneath heavy robes,  
Wearing a garland of  
Laurel leaves  
Like a halo  
Over the head

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

Of some Holy Saint,  
A detached observer  
Of life  
Rich and bountiful,  
Of sensation and sound  
Sight and smell,  
Awaiting  
The awakening  
Power of touch.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Charon

In a little aluminum boat  
On a narrow canal leading to the river,  
The one that passed along Mariner's Hospital,  
Our motor stalled  
And he pulled the cover off  
To open up the old Evinrude outboard  
And expose all its inner parts  
Like a heart surgeon  
Opening the chest  
Of a cardiac patient  
And separating the rib cage.

He tinkered with dials,  
Turned screws and twisted fuel hoses  
That wound like arteries  
Around parts he was trying to reach.  
Working without panic,  
But with quick urgency,  
He whispered a curse  
Quietly to himself, and forgot me  
In the back of the boat as I sat quietly  
And looked at the shore so close to us  
Shrouded in fog.

In time he gave up,  
Stood, grabbed single oar,  
And rowed us back to the boat livery;  
The water made a soft ripple  
As he pushed us under the Alter Road bridge  
That hung so low he had to sit  
As we passed under it,  
Then stood again, through the fog and rising mist  
He pushed us,  
Silhouetted in the weak light  
Of a grey morning.

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

### Dante

The ghost of the great poet  
Haunts my house.  
I see him walking in my kitchen  
In the first pale light of morning,  
A tall figure, monolithic  
In the long flowing grandeur  
Of medieval robes and  
Wearing a wreath of  
Laurel leaves upon his head,  
He stands with folded arms  
Before my refrigerator  
And stares at it  
As if it were a portal  
To paradise.

Opening the door  
He bends and leans in  
To rearrange items on a shelf  
And reaches far back  
For the jar of  
bread and butter pickles  
I bought last Friday morning  
At the organic food market in  
Colonia Chuburna de Hidalgo.  
I watch transfixed as this  
Kitchen apparition  
Walks to the dish rack  
For a clean fork, opens the jar  
And drops the metal lid  
Onto the counter.

He eats while making  
Little noises of great relish,  
And I marvel how every haunting  
Has a higher purpose  
And each ghostly visitation  
Brings a secret message,  
That even great spirits  
Have quirky needs and  
Simple human wants,  
Keenly felt cravings

## Imperfect Venus – A Collection of Poems by Doug Tanoury

And crazy longings  
That can magically transform  
The most common kitchen appliance  
Into the big white clouds of heaven

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### The Reign of the Penitents (And in Defense of April)

Today, there were roosters crowing  
In the darkness before the sunrise,  
And it is at such quiet and solitary moments  
That I sit pensive and penitent  
And try to remember them,  
Their faces and idiosyncratic manners,  
The little voices of life's most innocent beginnings  
Come back to me in April,

(I wish to speak in defense of April that Eliot so slandered in the Wasteland,  
But which in reality is no crueler than March that precedes it or May which  
Follows it, for each month I have found to be cruel in its own unique way.)

As I sit at the kitchen table thinking of them  
My head bent in a compunctious pose  
That makes me resemble  
An imperfect angel that Dali might paint  
With wings torn, flesh tattered  
And drawers opening from my  
Chest, torso, stomach and groin,

(The was an April once when the sun shined warm on still bare trees and  
We were together still in a kitchen, before a cold rain fell on us in a time  
When there were no roosters crowing in the darkness of early morning.)

Drawers that suggest a kind of order  
Where everything has a place and some hint  
Of an inner organization where this is separate  
From that and there a space  
Dedicated for everything and not one single  
Junk drawer where everything  
Is jammed into one tangled mess,

(Tulips and Irises begin their upward movement as green spikes chisel  
Through the black earth toward the first kiss of light, toward steel colored  
Clouds spread in flat sheets across the grey metallic sky of an April morning.)

But rather a spot for this regret  
And that remorse, this sorrow and that sadness  
This disappointment and that dark thought  
Arranged with compulsive perfection  
Not a place where each repentance meets  
Every penitence all together  
In one jumbled mess of being



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(There is the fragrance of lilacs floating on the air of memory and irises blooming  
Pale lavender and deep purple in the flat two dimensional perspective of a late  
April morning from long ago remembered and recalled anew.)

I am like an old bedroom bureau  
That stores many things, and there is  
An open drawer in the middle of my chest,  
Located just slightly to the left,  
Where there is a memory of the sound of their laughter,  
Innocent and pure, that shares the space  
With my heart alone.

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### Beatrice Resolves Dante's Doubts

#### I.

In my blue clouded vision of Paradise  
Dante approaches Beatrice, but  
She does not remember him at all;  
Even when he tries to remind her,  
She doesn't know him.

And a conversation takes place  
Between a stranger and a stalker,  
One who cannot recall  
And another who cannot forget  
Or shake the persistent obsession.

I cannot help but stop and dwell  
For a moment on the redundant  
Concept of "persistent obsession"  
That spreads through consciousness  
In the way that cancer cells divide.

And I pause quietly to ponder  
The relentless power that lives  
In the life cycles of cells,  
Small miracles of multiplication  
Through seemingly endless division.

There are implications here too  
Of the possible role it plays  
In the resurrection of the body, and  
The reconstruction of DNA by  
The process of binary fission.

#### II.

Back to the dead soul of Beatrice  
Sitting in the midst of the blue  
Clouded mist of Paradise,  
Her brow furrowed by a frown  
As she tries to recall the poet Dante,

But has no memory of him,  
As he stands wearing a wreath  
Of laurel leaves on his head with  
A look of profound puzzlement and  
Disappointment etched deep on his face.

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I am struck by the strangeness  
Of the inherent contradiction  
In the Gogolian term “dead soul”  
To describe the spirit of the dead  
Beatrice sitting on blue clouds.

I wonder if Cartesian dualism  
Has any relevance or offers any proof  
Of the spirit, or does the soul’s  
Incorporeal nature preclude death  
And imply its immortality?

In lace edged memory I recall  
Evidence Of my soul from long ago  
When I first witnessed irises and tiger lilies  
Growing together in my grandmother’s garden  
Along an eastside alley on a June morning.

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### Piccarda Donati

In my happiest apparition of heaven  
She is the first person I see  
To welcome me,  
Arms stretched open wide  
for a big embrace.

She calls my name  
And it is song,  
Sung sweetly to music  
That hangs in the air  
Without a visible source.

She is wearing flowing robes  
And is heralded  
By long blue banners unfurled.  
The sun is shining  
Brightly on us.

I stand up,  
And walking on clouds  
Approach her to quietly ask:  
“Is this the Temple Gate  
Called Beautiful?”

She does not answer  
But simply embraces me hard  
And holds me close to her  
Until I am lost  
In magenta robes,

And she whispers in my ear  
As we embrace,  
Half in Arabic, half in English:  
“God has forgiven  
All your sins.”

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### Delightful Mountain

This poem marks the progress of a poet,  
A lone figure in a flat and stark landscape  
Who strays from the straight white road and  
Wanders in a wilderness toward nearby

Green mountains topped with tall trees that  
Stands like a solitary sentinel to timeless beauty  
Awash in a noontime light without shadows  
Ahead or behind, left or right, east or west.

The late afternoon sun, that gives no warmth,  
Has sunk low in the sky, and it is the man alone  
That casts an oddly long shadow behind him  
In the temporal vortex called today.

In the far distant horizon where parallel lines  
Of the white path converge and come together,  
Then vanish, low mountain peaks rise up  
Into a cloudless and icy blue sky.

Only the green mountain and red robed man are connected  
By color that separates them from the pale washed out hues  
Of a two dimensional world that is a snow covered  
Field on a bright sunlit, but frozen, January afternoon.

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### St. John of the Ladder

St. John says that understanding  
Is a deliberate lifting up of one's self  
And comes by slow and steady effort,  
As if you are climbing a tall ladder  
Ring by rung, hand over hand and  
Step by step, where ascent is a  
Vertical exercise of beating down vice  
And stepping on them, one by one,  
To raise yourself up.

In his cell, a lone penitent kneels  
Head bowed deep in prayer,  
As virtues move beneath his garment  
And fly like white and tan pigeons,  
A rapid flurry of wings flapping  
Against the fabric of his hair shirt  
As they escape, one by one,  
To the window ledge and out  
To the open air.

For me, insight comes all at once  
Like a multi-vehicle crash on the interstate  
Where cars pile up on each other,  
One by one, at high speed  
To the bang of metal on metal,  
The boom of exploding airbags,  
As red brake lights silently pulse  
On and off bleeding out all my wrong  
And mistaken notions.

I prefer the more modern methods of  
Spiritual awakening in a midnight vigil  
With cars lined up, one by one,  
Awaiting neon lit enlightenment  
Dispensed at the all night drive through  
Of a fast food retail outlet and when the  
Speaker crackles, I lean my head out  
Of the car window and pray: "Please  
Forgive me, for I have sinned..."

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### St. Expedito

The red votive candle  
On my bookshelf--  
Never lit,  
Lets all things  
Come to pass  
In the sweetness  
Of their own time.

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### The Hagiography of a Flamingo Hopping on One Foot

#### I.

They say that St. Christina the Astonishing rose up after the Agnus Dei at her funeral Mass, levitated above her coffin and flew like a bird to perch on the highest rafters of the church, then descended to the altar, and told an amazing tale that she had visited heaven, hell and purgatory.

#### II.

She met many family and friends in purgatory and hell, but unfortunately saw no one that she knew in heaven except God Himself, and after this amazing day, she fled the company of people, complaining that she could smell their sins and it was a powerful stench.

#### III.

She would climb tall trees and sit in their top most branches with the birds. She would stay in a tree, looking up to heaven and praying for so long she would forget to eat. Christina was known on occasion to cast herself into fires and throw herself in open ovens, emerging unharmed and with no burns.

#### IV.

Cristina the Astonishing would also jump into the frozen river, remaining there for long periods of time as she prayed. Less fantastic, but certainly no less wondrous, eyewitness accounts describe that she prayed while doing cartwheels and while her body was curled up in a tight a ball.

#### V.

It has been documented by multiple sources, reliable religious and well regarded lay contemporaries, that on one particular occasion she was seen hopping about on one foot and crying out to God in a loud and powerful voice: "Look upon me, O Lord, for I am like unto a flamingo."

#### VI.

Saint Christina is by far the most magical bag lady in the communion of saints, and the most astonishing and unbelievable wonder she performed was this miraculous transformation into a flamingo as she hopped about on a single leg, an act in my mind that is singularly worthy of sainthood.



## Soliloquy of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger

My hermitage is a tall pillar  
Standing upon a high mountain,  
Elevated in living benediction, alone  
And solitary, among the highest places.

Escaping worldly temptation in my solitude,  
Floating somewhere between earth and sky,  
Tree and cloud, mountain and plain,  
I stand as a witness for my God.

When the sun blinds my eyes  
And burns my flesh, when the wind  
Whips and the rain lashes I am most  
Close to the pure happiness of heaven,

And I pray: take me, let lightning strike me  
In a storm and throw me down  
In flames to death and raise me up  
To New Life and The Communion of Saints.

Looking down, the world is so beautiful  
At a distance and the silence sings to my soul;  
In the evening when the warm breeze blows  
From the East, it is the whispering of God.

When the Evil one turns stones to loaves,  
Serpents to fish and scorpions to eggs, I close my  
Eyes and turn my head away, and Angels  
With blue faces minister to me.

And when He tempts me with a human touch,  
The sound of a woman's laughter, the warmth  
Of breasts and the softness of her belly,  
I shout my prayer of mortification of flesh.

The Prophets come to comfort me and  
Converse with me as a gentle rain  
Washes me clean and the wind dries me,  
As the top of my column becomes a tabernacle.

I have Holy Visions of the Lord  
Who teaches and instructs me and  
Gives me Holy Messages for the people  
Who come to this place to pray with me.

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He says that everyone who is isolated  
From their neighbor sits on a high pillar,  
And all who are angry with their brother  
Stand solitary and alone on a high column.

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### Santa María de la Cabeza

The head of Maria Torribia  
Is kept in a silver reliquary  
And in times of extreme draught  
It is brought out for procession  
Through the streets of Madrid.

In a wooden tabernacle  
Carved with the faces of  
Infant Angels and decorated  
With silk ribbons, streamers  
Of purple, green and blue.

The head is held high,  
Carried by the tallest man  
In the parish and followed  
By a long line of priests  
In black vestments.

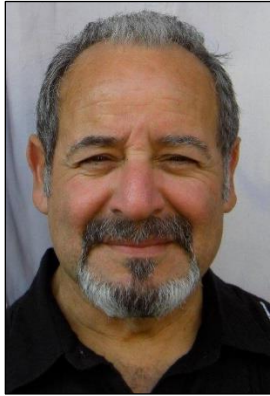
Saint Mary lost her child  
An event that shook her faith,  
Shaped her Sainthood, and made  
Her a humble hermit  
Praying on a hillside.

When the storm clouds gather  
In late August and the rain falls  
So heavy it obscures the landscape,  
It is simply a Saint remembering  
A life unlived.

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### About Doug Tanoury



Doug Tanoury has always felt that poetry should communicate the most complex concepts in the simplest language possible, and that the poetry should elevate common everyday experience into the extraordinary and fantastic. This transformation of mundane experience into the magical has always been the goal of his craft.

Doug Tanoury has been writing poetry all his adult life, and his work has been widely featured in journals, magazines and online publications.

### Other books of poetry by Doug Tanoury

- ❖ Art History
- ❖ Avon Poems
- ❖ Chicago Poems
- ❖ City Sonnets
- ❖ Cloud Boulevard
- ❖ Crows on My Path
- ❖ Detroit Poems
- ❖ Exodus Poems
- ❖ Getting Religion
- ❖ Hollywood Park Poems
- ❖ Merida Poems
- ❖ Of Evenings in Eden
- ❖ Produce Poems
- ❖ St. Mary's Art Cloister
- ❖ The Physics of Tea
- ❖ Theogony
- ❖ Tolstoy's Ghost
- ❖ Wounded Muse
- ❖ Zen Bandits